2005 is the year of the Mediterranean, of the 10th anniversary of the Barcelona Declaration and the year chosen by the EMWIS to address the Water Directors of the Euro-Mediterranean Partnership. As President of the EMWIS Steering Committee for the last 4 years, I have noticed major progresses: the reinforcement of the partnership spirit in the countries, the confirmation of the political support, and the transfer of ownership. I am convinced that we will succeed because EMWIS is more and more integrated by the institutions around the Mediterranean and not an initiative imposed from the outside.

The success of EMWIS has been acknowledged at the highest levels. In October 1999, the ministers of the 27 countries and the European Commission asserted again their commitment to use EMWIS more efficiently. In November 2001, in Madrid, the Water Directors reviewed the positive results and approved a development plan. In 2003, the EMWIS was presented as a cooperation model during the 3rd World Water Forum in Kyoto. At the end of this same year, the European Commission awarded a 3 years grant to implement the plan approved in Madrid two years before. EMWIS is based on a common need expressed by the EU countries and their Mediterranean Partners at the first Euro-Mediterranean Ministerial Conference on local Water Management in Marseille in 1996: the need to improve the water management practices and, also, to share water information. Both ideas were the foundations used to build up the EMWIS, a void structure to be filled with hard work, enthusiasm and sense of future.

Now, EMWIS has become the reality we know: a system for exchanging information on know-how in the water domain and also a cooperation tool among its partners, and among every person concerned or interested by water management in the Mediterranean region. It is the first tangible regional cooperation tool in the water sector within the Euro-Mediterranean Partnership, which is the central instrument in Euro-Mediterranean relations. Actually, the European Commission is determined to reinforce it through the European Neighbourhood Policy, the ambitious new policy designed to promote prosperity, stability, and security all over the Euro-Med region. In the Mediterranean area, water is a key issue for peace, and economic and social development. We must all make sure that water is recognised as a key priority at the regional level and within the National Action Plans.

We all know that EMWIS is a long term initiative involving a lot of cultural modifications, but I would like to list the key issues addressed by my Presidency to contribute to this process:

Most of the Mediterranean Partner Countries have re-affirmed their commitment EMWIS in spite of 11 months delay in 2003 to get the financial support for the 2nd phase. 35 countries, but as Mediterranean citizens we feel necessary to share our knowledge with and to learn from the experience of Mediterranean countries not signatory of the Barcelona Declaration: Libya and the Balkan Countries.

These are our challenges. EMWIS administrates knowledge, a virtual patrimony of words, figures and, at the end, ideas, that come up from the truth or, at least, from an objective reality very close to this concept. So, considering the truth as necessary element for the human relations, we believe that our organization gives a public service, directly available for the persons, the social groups and the nations. Let me express my conviction that being like that, EMWIS is a vocational agent of peace.

If well-administered knowledge is the keystone of problem-solving activities, there is no doubt about a real bottleneck: the diffusion of the knowledge. At that point, EMWIS is at work to fill the gap.

Juan CANOVAS-CUENCA
President of EMWIS Steering Committee

Information seminar on EMWIS and the water sector in Lebanon

In order to mobilise and raise awareness among the Lebanese water sector stakeholders on exchange of information and know-how, the Lebanese Ministry of Energy and Water (EMWIS National Focal POINT) jointly organised with EMWIS, an information seminar in Beirut November 10, 2005. This event was widely covered by the press and national television and attended by some fifty representatives of the institutional, academic, industrial, associative Lebanese water sector as well as international organisations.

This seminar was also the occasion to present the recent reorganisations of the water sector, the decentralized Lebanese water strategy, the assistance to the water institutions and an initiative of public-private partnership. The main international projects implemented at Lebanon were also presented and discussed with the participants; in particular an animated debate took place about the coordination of the projects, initiated within the regional MEDA program on local water management, which are implemented at Lebanon.

From left to right: Misters Muzzitli, Hacheim, Trottlet and Consar

The speech of the Minister and the presentations are available starting from the Lebanese Focal Point web site: www.emwis.lb.org or EMWIS web site:
http://www.semidc.org/documents/html/liban’05.htm
A more ambitious technical architecture was necessary to improve multilingual content management, the cooperation with and between the various national water information systems and to guarantee an effective exchange of information of any nature. Consequently, it was decided to implement a content management system using standardised but flexible information formats (based on XML: extensible markup language) in accordance with the concepts of the Web-service. Within this framework, common metadata have been defined for all the focal points and a multilingual water thesaurus (Arab, English and French) for EMWIS (being able to evolve to water ontologies) is under preparation. An invitation to tender was launched mid-2005 for the development of new regional web portals. Italian company FINSIEL was selected, with an open source solution based on EnviroWindow, a system previously developed for the European Environment Agency (EEA). Thus EMWIS will benefit from existing ontology and will be able to evolve to water ontologies.

New EMWIS website

The EMWIS approach in the Mediterranean area and consolidate it on the applications of geographical information systems in the water sector. The national EMWIS web site is strongly linked with the institutional site of the State Secretariat in charge of water (www.walter.gov.ma). A network gathering the main water stakeholders is in the course of constitution to contribute to the site content.

Medium-term, the focal point is planning the edition of a national brochure, the contents translation of the Web site (userfriendliness, visual, translation, etc) and to implement the standardised protocols and formats for information exchange.

Renewal of INBO – MENBO – EMWIS agreement
At the General meeting of the Mediterranean Network of Basin organisations (INBO) in Marrakech in May 2005, the partnership agreement initiated in 2002 between the EMWIS, the International Network of Basin organisations (INBO) and the MENBO was renewed. Within this framework, the main cooperation actions will be continued, in particular the transfer of knowhow related to the implementation of the Water framework directive or the development of a worldwide water information system on based on the EMWIS approach in Mediterranean and also adopted in other areas of the world.